

AFAM 491
African Americans in the Media
Spring 2014

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Course Description

Media has played an important role in our society's ever-evolving constructions and representations of race, as contextualized in the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. For African Americans, at least, media representations often were gender-specific and provided political and social impetus for exaggerated and misrepresented black femininity and masculinity. This course will analyze and critique representations of African Americans in media—newspapers and magazines, film, radio, television, and new media – and explore the juxtaposition of external and internal representations of race and gender. Importantly, African Americans created and attempted to sustain an advocacy media to project positive representations and in the process to affirm and validate the existence and collective experiences of their race. Thus, African American counter-media production and the negotiation of negative and positive representations also will be examined in this course. Guiding questions for this course include: what are media representations of African Americans; what are the political and social implications of mass media representations of African Americans; how are these representations internalized by mainstream and black audiences; what is African American media; and who authors African American media.

Learning Objectives

At the end of the semester, students in this course will be able to:

1. Discuss and connect African-American history to the ebbs and flows of African American media history and culture.
2. Evaluate African Americans in a variety of mass media mediums including but not limited to newspapers/magazines, movies, radio, television, and new media.
3. Identify and recommend specific ways to improve the images of African Americans in popular culture.
4. Apply African American Studies, Gender Studies, and Media Studies theories to African-Americans and the media.
5. Define African American mass media and be able to answer the questions posed in the course description.
6. Establish connections between disciplines and pursue knowledge through a variety of sources and write with greater proficiency and style.

7. Analyze print and non-print materials, make comparisons of particulars, draw and support conclusions and improve critical thinking skills, from knowledge to synthesis and evaluation.

Books

Catherine Squires, *African Americans and the Media*

Charles Simmons, *The African American Press: A History of News Coverage during National Crises, with Special Reference to Four Black Newspapers, 1827-1965*

William Barlow, *Voice Over: The Making of Black Radio*

Ronald L. Jackson II, *Scripting the Black Masculine Body: Identity, Discourse, and Racial Politics in Popular Media*

Beretta E. Smith-Shomade, *Shaded Lives: African American Women and Television*

Grading Scale

A 100-90 **B** 89-80 **C** 79-70 **D** 69-60 **F** Below 60

| <u>Assignments</u> | <u>Percentage</u> | <u>Due Date</u> |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Participation | 50% | Daily |
| Critiques | 25% | See Description |
| Semester Project | 25% | 12/03 |

Requirements:

Critiques:

Each student will produce a WordPress website and post her/his critiques and semester project. The website design must have a static homepage, about me page, critiques page, and semester project page (the student can be creative in naming the pages). Each website should have a theme related to the class (this is required if you choose to make the blog your semester project if not then it does not need a theme but it will aid you in your writing). For example, it could be African Americans and Beauty in the Media (in magazines, TV, and/or radio), African Americans and Gender in the Media (can be separated into men or women), African Americans and love relationship in the media, African Americans and family in the media (this could be divided up into fatherhood, motherhood, childhood) but it also could be a general theme site on African Americans and popular culture. The home page must describe the theme for your website. The about me section is about the student and African Americans in the Media. The critique page is

a dynamic webpage where the student will post four critiques on the news/magazines, film, radio, television, and/or new media.

Narrow down your topic and couple it to a theory like Black masculinity, Black Feminism, authenticity, and other theoretical frameworks introduced in the class or from African American Studies or Media Studies. Apply the theories to the primary source to make an analysis about African Americans in the Media. Primary sources include movies, TV shows, radio shows' transcripts, magazines, newspapers, and web series. The analysis must have a thesis, a theory, an explanation of the theory, ample examples of the primary sources, ample evidence and proof for the thesis. The unique thing about the website is that the student may embed videos, photos, and other media directly into the analysis. For instance, if the student is analyzing a television show then embed the video for your audience to be able to watch and still have in text reference to the video.

There is no word count requirement however the quality must be present with a thorough analysis of African American media and that genre. In the analysis, the student must use in text citations when quoting and paraphrasing. Although it is being produced for the web, the analysis must adhere to conventional written norms and expectations of academic papers. At the end of the critique, the student must include a bibliography and it is different than a work cited page. The bibliography must adhere to Chicago Manual Style. The conventions of blogging should be used as well and the paragraphs should be shorter no more than five lines per paragraph and a space between each paragraph. You may use linking to take the reader to other websites but you cannot use personal pronouns or contractions. At the end of the syllabus, the student will find a rubric that outlines how I will grade these critiques. I will add some in class instruction on the website, critiques, and design during the semester. Please ask any questions or concerns about this format to the professor in a timely manner.

The due date for the critiques is as follow: Critique 1 February 5, Critique 2 February 26, Critique 3 March 26, and Critique 4 April 23.

Each critique is due a week after we finish reading ALL of the materials dealing with that topic—newspapers/magazines, radio, film, television, and new media.

Semester Project:

In consultation with the professor, the students will work individually, in groups, or with the professor and design her/his own semester project. Students wanting to work in groups must put their own team together, but groups are limited to 2-3 people. It is required that students writes up a proposal outlining her/his/their project detailing the project and the presentation. The semester project must deal with African Americans, the media and address some theme covered in the course with a critical analysis. Students may continue her/his website's theme and expand it or create a documentary film, create a play/skit depicting African Americans and the media, and a host of other creative outlets. Also, the student may elect to write a 17-20 page paper but all **students must get prior approval before beginning the project**. Towards the end of the semester, every student/group is required to present the project in a compelling manner, which must

include the findings, and the analysis. The presentation should match the type of project the student completed. Please use and consider a variety of presentation methods, **excluding** Power Point or lecture-style reading and speaking.

Alternative Semester Project

I want to propose for the entire class to do a semester project together where we actually produce an African American media. We can do a website on African American news, a documentary of African American media in Richmond, or creating a web series. We will discuss this option fully on the first night and make a decision.

Participation:

Each student is expected to contribute to the dialogue/discourse/discussion of the class. The student accomplishes this by responding to the readings by critiquing the readings, analyzing the readings, and/or synthesizing the readings.

You may participate by:

1. Asking poignant questions about the readings, lectures, and/or discussions.
2. Responding to a question asked by the professor, faculty, guest speakers, or other class members.
3. Making an analytical comment or observation.
4. Bring in newspaper/magazine/media that deals with an aspect of class that we are currently discussing or have discussed.

It is necessary and important for you to read the assigned readings prior to coming to class to be able to fully participate and contribute to class. I would advise you to follow my example on how to discuss the material in class—integrating readings, discussions, and outside materials from other courses. What is not expected is for the student to summarize the readings, tell how the readings made the student feel, tell the fact that the student did not know about a particular idea(s), or discuss only one or two of the assignments.

These class discussions and posts are worth 50% of your grade and show the importance I believe these are to your education on African Americans in the Media. Please put in the appropriate amount of time and due diligence. It is necessary and important for you to read the assigned readings prior to class and to understand what you have read. Exams, quizzes, and in class assignments fall under participation and these assignments will be given throughout the semester to test proficiency and understanding of the readings and lectures. As a class, we will figure out the best way to test proficiencies but the ultimate decision lies with the professor.

Attendance:

Attendance is vital during the semester and I will be taking attendance daily. The student will receive one day for an unexcused absence before her/his attendance adversely affects her/his grade. After the 1st absence, the course grade will be dropped one letter grade per occurrence. For example, if you missed 3 days and had an A in the class, the new grade would be a C for the two extra days. Of course, emergencies happen and will be

considered only with written documentation (doctor's note, funeral program, traffic accident, ticket, etc). Also, tardies will be counted. Tardy constitutes being ten to twenty minutes late and being more than 20 minutes late will count as absence. Leaving more than 10 minutes before the end of the class session constitutes an absence and/or if the student was tardy and leaves more than 10 minutes early. Two tardies will count as one absence, so please come to class on time.

Excused Absences for Students Representing the University

Students who represent the university (athletes and others) do not choose their schedules. Student athletes are required to attend games and/or meets. All student athletes should provide their schedule to the instructor at the beginning of the semester. The Intercollegiate Athletic Council strongly encourages faculty to treat missed classes or exams (because of a scheduling conflict) as excused absences and urges faculty to work with the students to make up the work or exam.

All work is due when specified and late materials will not be accepted unless accompanied with written documentation (e.g. doctor's note, funeral program). If you have an emergency please contact me as soon as possible so we can discuss how to handle the assignment.

E-mail Policy

Electronic mail or "e-mail" is considered an official method for communication at VCU because it delivers information in a convenient, timely, cost effective and environmentally aware manner. Students are expected to check their official VCU e-mail on a frequent and consistent basis in order to remain informed of university-related communications. The university recommends checking e-mail daily. Students are responsible for the consequences of not reading, in a timely fashion, university-related communications sent to their official VCU student e-mail account. This policy ensures that all students have access to this important form of communication. It ensures students can be reached through a standardized channel by faculty and other staff of the university as needed. Mail sent to the VCU e-mail address may include notification of university-related actions, including disciplinary action. Please read the policy in its entirety: <http://www.ts.vcu.edu/kb/3407.html>

VCU Honor System: Upholding Academic Integrity

The VCU Honor System policy describes the responsibilities of students, faculty and administration in upholding academic integrity, while at the same time respecting the rights of individuals to the due process offered by administrative hearings and appeals. According to this policy, "Members of the academic community are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity." In addition, "All members of the VCU community are presumed to have an understanding of the VCU Honor System and are required to:

- Agree to be bound by the Honor System policy and its procedures;
- Report suspicion or knowledge of possible violations of the Honor System;
- Support an environment that reflects a commitment to academic integrity;

Answer truthfully when called upon to do so regarding Honor System cases, and, Maintain confidentiality regarding specific information in Honor System cases."

[View the Honor System](#) in its entirety. More information can also be found on the [Division of Student Affairs](#) website.

Students with Disabilities

SECTION 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as amended require that VCU provides "academic adjustments" or "reasonable accommodations" to any student who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity. To receive accommodations, students must request them by contacting the Disability Support Services Office on the Monroe Park Campus (828-2253) or the Division for Academic Success on the MCV campus (828-9782). More information is available at [Disability Support Services](#) or the [Division for Academic Success](#).

Any student who has a disability that requires an academic accommodation should schedule a meeting with the instructor at the student's earliest convenience. Additionally, if coursework requires the student to work in a lab environment, the student should advise the instructor or a department chairperson of any concerns that the student may have regarding safety issues related to a disability. Students should follow this procedure for all courses in the academic semester.

Statement on Military Short-Term Training or Deployment

If military students receive orders for short-term training or deployment, they should inform and present their orders to Military Student Services and to their professor(s). For further information on policies and procedures contact Military Services at 828-5993 or access the [corresponding policies](#).

Student Conduct in the Classroom

According to the [Faculty Guide to Student Conduct in Instructional Settings](#), "The university is a community of learners. Students, as well as faculty, have a responsibility for creating and maintaining an environment that supports effective instruction. In order for faculty members (including graduate teaching assistants) to provide and students to receive effective instruction in classrooms, laboratories, studios, online courses, and other learning areas, the university expects students to conduct themselves in an orderly and cooperative manner." **Among other things, cell phones and beepers should be turned off while in the classroom.** Also, the university Rules and Procedures prohibit anyone from having "in his possession any firearm, other weapon, or explosive, regardless of whether a license to possess the same has been issued, without the written authorization of the President of the university..." For more information, visit the [VCU Insider online](#).

Eating in class is acceptable if it is a snack e.g. potato chips, candy bar, or a drink. Please do not bring a full course meal to class and expect to eat it. **I do not allow the use of laptops, iPads, or any other computing device to be used during class unless absolutely necessary.** However, if you are caught using it for Facebook, surf the internet,

play games, anything that is not dealing with the class then you will lose the privilege of having the ability to use the device in the class for the rest of the semester.

Please no hats, caps, sunglasses, or any other headgear unless you need them for religious purposes (“bad hair days” are not a reason that I accept and this policy is for men and women). **Remove these items prior to entering the classroom even if you are early.** Please as much as possible—ladies do not wear revealing clothing that is either too short, too loose, too tight, etc. and gentlemen refrain from sagging your pants to show undergarments, wearing revealing clothing that is also too tight, too short, too loose, etc.

My professor often said, “The law of common courtesy has not yet been repealed.” I hope that we will engage in many debates over the semester. I expect that we will all treat each other and each other’s ideas with respect.

Schedule

| Date | Topics & Activities | Readings Due | Lecture | Assignments Due |
|-------|--|--|---|-------------------------------|
| 01/15 | Introductions What is Mass Media? African American Studies and Gender Studies Theories | Squires Introduction | | |
| 01/22 | Print Media | Squires Ch. 1-4 Simmons Ch. 1-7 | Free African Americans during Enslavement | |
| 01/29 | Print Media | Squires Ch. 1-4 Simmons Ch. 1-7 | Post Emancipation to Civil Rights | |
| 02/05 | Print Media | Squires Ch. 1-4 Simmons Ch. 1-7 | Civil Rights and Beyond | |
| 02/12 | Film Black Male Body Politics | Squires Ch. 5-7 Jackson Intro-5 | African Americans in Film- Bert Williams, Oscar Micheaux, and Paul Robeson | Newspaper Critique |
| 02/19 | Film Black Male Body Politics | Squires Ch. 5-7 Jackson Intro-5 | Hip Hop and African American Films | |

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|-------|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| 02/26 | Radio | Squires Ch. 8-10 Barlow Intro- 15 | Film Critique |
| 03/05 | Radio | Squires Ch. 8-10 Barlow Intro- 15 | |
| 03/12 | Spring Break | | |
| 03/19 | Radio | Squires Ch. 8-10 Barlow Intro- 15 | March 21 Last Day to Withdraw |
| 03/26 | Television | Squires Ch. 11- 13 Shomade Intro- Ch. 5 | Radio Critique |
| 04/02 | Television | Squires Ch. 11- 13 Shomade Intro- Ch. 5 | |
| 04/09 | Television | Squires Ch. 11- 13 Shomade Intro- Ch. 5 | |
| 04/16 | New Media and the Future | Squires Ch. 14 Shomade Epilogue Jackson Epilogue | |
| 04/23 | New Media and the Future & Review | Squires Ch. 14 Shomade Epilogue Jackson Epilogue | Television Critique/ New Media Critique |
| 04/30 | NO CLASS | | |
| 05/07 | Projects Presentations | | Project Presentations |

*****The Syllabus & Schedule is subject to change*****
Some readings may be added or others may be taken away

Rubric for Critiques

Thesis: **10%**
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

It is a clear, concise, developed and viable thesis statement that outlines the theory, analysis, and argument for the critique. It is located at the end of the introduction.

Content: **30%**
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Facts and ideas developed to prove the thesis, relevance to media, analyzes the element using a theory with evidence

Blogging **10%**
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Multimedia content—photos, video, linking, etc

Logic & Argument: **10%**
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Do the facts, ideas, and/or proof offer a clear and logical argument? Do you prove your argument?

Audience, Tone, Point of View: **10%**
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Clear discernment of distinctive audience; tone and point of view appropriate to the assignment

Organization: **10%**
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Is the paper organized logically—introduction, body, and conclusion? Does the paper follow the structure dictated by the thesis?

Structure: **10%**
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Sentence structured effectively, powerfully; rich, well-chosen variety of sentence styles and length. Vocabulary has a range, accuracy, and correct and effective word usage

Technical Writing Quality: **10%**
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Chicago Manual Style, spelling, grammar

Comments _____

